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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: INTERNAL CHALLENGES TO BELKHADDEM'S FLN LEADERSHIP
NOT CONSIDERED THREATENING

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton
for reasons 1.4 b, d.

¶1. (C) A number of political party contacts tell us that rivals of Prime Minister Belkhadem are increasingly seeking to thwart his presidential ambitions by painting a picture of a prime minister who is so consumed by in-fighting within his own party that he is unable to govern effectively. Party stalwarts and parliamentarians in the presidential coalition dismiss the view of Belkhadem's detractors that his leadership of the FLN is in peril. Several of these sources told us that opponents of Belkhadem's presidential aspirations are deliberately fanning the flames of dissension within the FLN.

¶2. (C) The party of Algerian independence, the FLN brings together an array of moderate Islamists, socialists, and others under a single umbrella and has always been prone to internal battles. The communications director for the FLN observed that most of the "battles" these days arise from the fierce competition among candidates to have their names appear high on party lists in the lead up to the May parliamentary elections. For him it was ironic that the FLN, which "dominates the political scene" in Algeria, was being accused in the press of anti-democratic behavior when its process for establishing electoral lists in districts across the country was, he claimed, quite democratic. He also noted that the FLN was alone among political parties in establishing a goal for the number of female candidates (20%) in the May parliamentary elections.

¶3. (C) FLN officials denied that any one element of the FLN was creating havoc for the party leadership. However, one FLN MP who was dispatched in late November to mediate a dispute among unidentified local party officials told us that much of the infighting these days is being engineered by supporters of Ali Benflis, who was ousted as party leader in a Belkhadem-orchestrated coup in 2004. The MP told PolEc Chief that her mediation was one of a series of recent efforts to address the concerns of pro-Benflis malcontents with a personal grudge against Belkhadem. Moves against Belkhadem's leadership, usually in party offices in smaller districts across the country, continue to preoccupy the FLN, according to this MP. She contended, though, that any distraction in the ranks of the FLN from such disputes seldom required Belkhadem's personal attention. Despite the dissatisfaction of Benflis supporters and some senior FLN party leaders with Belkhadem's leadership, Belkhadem's leadership in her view was very much assured.

¶4. (C) Belkhadem's detractors inside and outside the FLN

agree the PM is not going to lose his FLN presidency anytime soon. Nouredine Ait Messaoudene, executive director of the moderate Islamist (and presidential coalition member) MSP party, told us the FLN party leaders are not about to dump Belkhadem without having in mind a suitable successor, and FLN contacts concur that those Belkhadem's opponents within the party cannot agree on a candidate to replace him. It's one thing to agree that Belkhadem is not the ideal leader but quite another to find someone more suitable, observed Ait Messaoudene. More to the point, Belkhadem continues to enjoy the support of President Bouteflika, who supported his 2004 takeover of the party leadership from Benflis. FLN sources tell us few in the party dissatisfied with Belkhadem's leadership for ideological reasons are likely to cast their lot with the Benflis "anybody-but-Belkhadem" camp because they know chances of ousting the sitting PM are slim. Besides, Bouteflika is very popular among the FLN faithful. As one FLN MP put it, what Bouteflika wants matters most.

DAUGHTON